



Flu Season is Coming... Are You Ready?

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Autumn means school is back in full swing, pumpkins are fattening on the vine and ripe for carving. The days are cooler and shorter, leaves are falling, and people start getting...the flu.

Influenza, or 'flu,' is caused by a virus that spreads through respiratory droplets in the air and on surfaces when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The droplets can enter another person's body a couple of ways. Someone can breathe them in or they can touch the eyes, nose, or mouth after touching a surface where infected respiratory secretions landed. Once a person is infected, symptoms usually begin to appear within one to four days and can last for up to two weeks. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, and occasionally diarrhea and vomiting.



While most people who get the flu have an uncomfortable but relatively mild illness, others are at high risk for severe illness and even death. Those people include infants, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with illnesses that affect their ability to fight off diseases, such as cancer or autoimmune disorders. The Centers for Disease Control estimates, on average, 36,000 people will die each year from the flu or flu-related complications.

There are effective ways to prevent catching it or spreading it. Important prevention activities include: washing your hands frequently, especially if you are sick, coughing or sneezing into a tissue or a sleeve and throwing used tissues away, staying home if you are sick so you don't spread germs and getting an annual flu vaccination.

According to the CDC, the flu vaccine effectively prevents flu infection for most people, and can lessen the severity of the illness in those for whom it doesn't provide complete protection. The flu vaccine for the 2011-2012 season is effective against the three most common strains circulating this year, including the H1N1 strain first identified in 2009.

Everyone over the age of 6 months is encouraged to get a flu vaccination each year. Yearly vaccinations are necessary because flu viruses tend to change over time, which means that the vaccine has to change along with the viruses in order to be effective. The vaccine is now available in three different forms: a shot in the muscle, a nasal spray, and a shot under the skin. On Fort Carson, both the shot in the muscle and nasal spray will be offered this year.

Evans Army Community Hospital Preventive Medicine will host seasonal influenza immunization clinics for all TRICARE beneficiaries aged 6 months and up who need only a flu vaccination. The clinics are at the Family Readiness Center, building 6237 on Mekong St. on the following dates:

October 17-20, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

October 24-27, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

October 22, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The flu clinic will be closed on Fridays and Sundays.

In addition, retirees can receive their flu shot at Retiree Appreciation Day on October 15 at the Special Events Center.

Active Duty Service Members will be vaccinated with their units.

For more information on influenza and vaccinations, a recorded flu information message is available at 719-526-6422 and at http://www.evans.amedd.army.mil/PM/flu_information.htm.

General influenza information is also available at www.cdc.gov and www.flu.gov.